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Miami News Photo by Bob Bailey

Zeeman, Right, Welcomed At Airport

## FORCED LANDING

# Freed Pilot Calls Cubans Decent Guys

By MARTY SCHRAM

Reporter of The Miami News

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Eight days ago Marshall Zeeman's gas-starved plane touched down near second base on a remote Cuban baseball field.

Across the foul line stood 50 Fidel Castro loyalists, many with guns.

"I took one look at them and I knew I was in trouble," the 20-year-old Coral Gables pilot said. So he climbed out of his single-seat, crop-dusting Piper Pawnee and "surrendered."

Today, back home safely, Zeeman praised his captors, who held him under house arrest for six days and questioned him in front of the Cuban people.

"They were considerate and respectful," Zeeman said. "They gave me everything I wanted — but my freedom."

Zeeman was ferrying the \$15,000 craft from Fort Lauderdale to Bogota, Colombia, for the Aircraft Ferry Corp. A week ago Saturday he flew the first leg of the journey — from Miami to Kingston, Jamaica.

At 6 a.m. the next day, the radioless, one-engine "duster" took off for Bogota. But he found bad weather along the mountainous South American republic's coast, so he turned around and headed towards Kingston.

In the darkness of night, he overshot Jamaica, and landed in the field near Santiago, on Cuba's southeast coast . . . "with just one gallon of usable gas left in my tank."

He was taken to a modern, four-bedroom house in Pilon — formerly a private home but now a government house — where he was kept under a six-man guard, and interrogated.

"Apparently I had landed right near the site of a new airport, and they were suspicious," Zeeman said after arriving in Miami last night.

"They kept asking me the same questions over and over again. They thought I was a CIA agent."

Wednesday, they let Zeeman call his 21-year-old brother, Richard, with whom he shares an apartment at 6580 Santana Ave., to assure him he was all right.

And yesterday, his Communist captors patched up his tiny plane (it had a damaged rear aileron), gave him 150 gallons of gas and bid him bon voyage. Zeeman flew to Kingston and hopped a Pan American jet back to Miami.

"I had a wonderful relationship with the Cuban people," Zeeman told reporters here. "They're very nice, and very sincere. I think maybe there have been lies on both sides; because a lot of what they say they truly believe."

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